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MUFON

Commentary

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Serious UFO probes goal of organization

By Catherine Enns

The phenomenon of unidentified flying objects is something that at once fascinates and repels people. People enjoy hearing about them, but whether or not they believe those stories is another thing.

Most often, the people who report UFO encounters are written off as "kooks."

The Mutual UFO Network, Inc.,(MUFON) is an organization which is attempting to scientifically investigate UFO sightings and lend credence to occurrences that are often skeptically dismissed. It is also the organization's aim to prove that UFOs are something that need to be studied and taken seriously.

Massachusett's MUFON has about 1,000 members who have joined by invitation-only. The group has 30 field investigators who voluntarily interview witnesses and probe UFO sightings.

Barry Greenwood, a Stoneham resident and historian for the state group, spouts out sightings and dates with a computer-like memory. While he coordinates information for the state group, he has been responsible for having dozens of U.S. Government documents on UFOs declassified for release to the public.

In Massachusetts alone, there have been 900 to 1,000 reports investigated in which there was convincing evidence that the witness did see an unidentified flying object. That means the person saw something, usually a pattern of lights or an object, that traveled in an unconventional manner that could not be explained by the presence of other aircraft in the area at the time of the sighting.

"There are a large number of sightings made by highly reliable people," said Greenwood. "Only about one percent of all reports are true frauds, and government data supports that."

While witnesses are sometimes able to take photographs — perhaps the only hard evidence availabe for UFO study — investigators generally rely on the person's word.

"You have to take the stories from whence they come," Greenwood said. "You can't have actual proof, but if the people are very sincere, we take it all into consideration.

"It's frustrating," he continued. "The UFO investigators want to get something the scientists will look at. But the nature of the phenomenon is that these things are very elusive. It's a transient phenomenon, but it's real. It's there and we have to deal with it."

Greenwood told about a sighting in Massachusetts from what is considered a reliable source — a former pilot of the Royal Air Force. The man was in the Sears parking lot in Cambridge when he spotted a disc-shaped object in the sky.

"He watched it for several minutes and then it disappeared. The witness was very reliable and gave a very good description. He said he saw it and we believe it," Greenwood said.

MUFON members do not go out and watch the skies for UFOs, Greenwood emphasized. "That would be like sitting on a street corner waiting for an accident to happen," he said. Greenwood himself is conservative when it comes to describing the lone UFO he has spotted.

"It was nothing spectacular, just a light in the sky which seemed to jockey back and forth," he said.

But it is the more spectacular sightings that excite Greenwood: the ones in which several witnesses independently report the same thing; instances where the seemingly-impossible occur; and government documents which detail pilots' encounters with strange aircraft.

Greenwood is troubled by the government's decision to stop official UFO investigations.

"The government has said that UFO studies won't further scientific knowledge and that UFOs are not a threat to national security. If that is true, why do I get documents like this?" he asked, holding up a C.I.A. report totally blacked out by censors.

Greenwood, who is employed by the U.S. Postal Service, has been following UFOs for 17 years. He has a "pet theory" to answer the argument that if there are UFOs and beings from another world why they have yet to contact us — at least officially.

"I can't prove it, but I think it is a reasonable explanation. These beings must be very advanced and highly intelligent. They are studying us very much like our culture might study a group of tribesmen in New Guinea. You observe but you don't interfere. They are collecting data," he said.